

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A ribozyme that inhibits estrogen-dependent tumor cell proliferation, said ribozyme having
5 a high substrate specificity for an mRNA sequence encoding a DNA-binding domain of the human
estrogen receptor of SEQ ID NO:4, wherein said ribozyme is essentially free of endonuclease
activity for an mRNA having a DNA binding domain of a glucocorticoid receptor.
2. The ribozyme of claim 1 further defined as RZ1, RZ2, RZ3, RZ4, RZ5, RZ6 or RZ7.
- 10 3. The ribozyme of claim 2 further defined as RZ1 and as cleaving the human estrogen
receptor mRNA at a site defined as nucleotide position +956 of hER α .
4. The ribozyme of claim 1 further defined as a hammerhead ribozyme having a catalytic core
15 sequence region defined by sequence SEQ ID NO:3.
5. The ribozyme of claim 2 further defined as RZ2 and as cleaving the human estrogen
receptor mRNA at a site defined as nucleotide position +894 of hER α .
- 20 6. The ribozyme of claim 1 wherein the human estrogen receptor is further defined as estrogen
receptor α (ER α).
7. The ribozyme of claim 4 further defined as blocking intracellular *trans*-activation of the
estrogen receptor and inhibiting cell cycling of the estrogen-dependent tumor cell.
- 25 8. A method for inhibiting estrogen-dependent tumor cell proliferation, comprising
administering ribozyme RZ1, RZ2, RZ3, RZ4, RZ5, RZ6, RZ7, or a combination thereof, to cells
comprising estrogen-dependent tumor cells, thereby inhibiting proliferation of said estrogen-
dependent tumor cells.
- 30 9. The method of claim 8 wherein the estrogen dependent tumor cell is an estrogen dependent
breast cancer cell.

10. The method of claim 8 wherein a vector that expresses said ribozyme, or a combination thereof, is administered to said estrogen-dependent tumor cells.

5 11. The method of claim 8 wherein said ribozyme is RZ1 and comprises the sequence of SEQ ID NO:3.

12. The method of claim 10 wherein said vector is an adenovirus vector.

10 13. The method of claim 10 when said vector is an adeno-associated viral vector, a lentivirus, a herpes simplex virus, a liposome or a molecular conjugate.

14. A method for reducing breast cancer cell proliferation, comprising:

15 preparing a pharmaceutically acceptable formulation suitable for injection to an animal, wherein said formulation includes as an active ingredient a ribozyme having binding affinity for the human estrogen receptor messenger RNA of SEQ ID NO:4, said ribozyme effectively reducing amounts of human estrogen receptor mRNA in said cell population; and

20 administering said pharmaceutically acceptable formulation to an animal having breast cancer, thereby reducing breast cancer cell proliferation.

15 15. The method of claim 14 wherein said ribozyme is further defined as cleaving the mRNA of
25 SEQ ID NO:4 at nucleotide position 170, 190, 267, 377, 508, 515, 543, 603, 645, 889, 894, 956, 1137, 1218, 1240, 1420, 1463, 1468, 1680, 1695, 1726, 2077, or a combination thereof.

16. The method of claim 15 wherein said ribozyme is further defined as cleaving the mRNA of
30 SEQ ID NO:4 at nucleotide position 377 (RZ3), 889 (RZ4), 894 (RZ2), 956 (RZ1), 1680 (RZ5), 1695 (RZ6), 1726 (RZ7), or a combination thereof.

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17. The method of claim 14 wherein the animal is a human.

18. A pharmaceutically acceptable formulation that inhibits human breast cancer cell
5 proliferation comprising as an active ingredient a ribozyme having specific binding affinity to the
human estrogen receptor messenger RNA sequence of SEQ ID NO:4.

19. The pharmaceutically acceptable formulation of claim 18 wherein said ribozyme is further
defined as specifically cleaving the human estrogen receptor mRNA of SEQ ID NO:4 at nucleotide
10 position 377, 889, 894, 956, 1240, 1680, 1695, 1726, or a combination thereof.

20. A ribozyme that cleaves in a site specific manner human estrogen receptor mRNA of SEQ
ID NO:4 at nucleotide position 377 (RZ3), 889 (RZ4), 894 (RZ2), 956 (RZ1), 1680 (RZ5), 1695
(RZ6), 1726 (RZ7), or a combination thereof.

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21. A ribozyme that cleaves in a site specific manner at a human estrogen receptor mRNA
sequence at position 956, 1137, 1218, 1240, 1420, 1463, 1468, 1680, 1695, 1726, 2077 of SEQ ID
NO:4, or a combination thereof.

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22. A ribozyme that cleaves in a site specific manner at a mRNA for human estrogen receptor
of a sequence of SEQ ID NO:4 positioned in an open loop region that is flanked on each side by an
AU-rich region.